

# FireFighter

The magazine of the Fire Brigades Union [www.fbu.org.uk](http://www.fbu.org.uk)

March 2009

**WE ARE  
BUSY.  
PLEASE  
CALL  
BACK**

£1.4 billion on regional controls  
– this is what you'll get  
**See page 12**

## Dear Audit Commission

Cuts do hit safety  
**Page 14**



## Safer Firefighters Safer Communities

New figures show rise  
in serious injuries as  
campaign progresses  
**Page 10**

## What does a women's rep do?

Sharon Sales Mossop on  
welfare in Strathclyde  
**Page 16**



# Audit Commission – more attacks on the way



You will read in this month's magazine further analysis and comment arising from the recent report on our service produced by the Audit Commission (Rising to the Challenge). There is nothing particularly clever about this report. The truth is it is simply about cost-cutting. To write a report of this nature you do not need to be an expert in the field you are examining. The authors of this report are not experts on the fire and rescue service – hopefully they do not even claim to be. They have not examined the operational impact of their suggestions because they are simply not qualified to do so. Nor have they consulted with the professionals on the ground. Instead they have adopted a simplistic

approach of claiming that savings made in one fire and rescue service can be applied elsewhere. That is how they come up with the claim that £200 million could be saved if all services adopted the practices of the "best". These claims are staggering. They ignore the differences between localities. They ignore the issue of whether the so-called 'solutions' are appropriate in all circumstances. They ignore questions about whether such measures have already been taken (i.e. you can't make the same savings twice). Most importantly they completely ignore the impact their proposals would have on the real work of the Fire and Rescue Service – our ability to respond safely and effectively to emergency incidents. As we

show on page 14, savings made do not necessarily mean a better service for the public or for firefighters. The difference between the Audit Commission and the FBU is that we actually care about our service and our profession. We want to ensure that the public get the best possible provision and firefighters are kept safe. Those issues were not even on the agenda in the work of the Audit Commission.

## Economic Crisis – it's time for a change

The economy here and across the globe is in a complete mess. The crisis has brought job losses, house repossession and uncertainty to millions of families in the UK. Firefighters will not be exempt. Many of you have relatives caught up by redundancies or

## Contents

### Features

#### 10 FIREFIGHTERS' SAFETY

Record levels of major injuries underline concerns

#### 12 PLEASE CALL BACK

Standard 999 operators will filter calls to fire service

#### 14 CUTS DO HIT SAFETY

Audit Commission's own evidence shows there can be no more cuts

### Regulars

#### 4 NEWS

Government refuses to implement statutory duty;  
Tam Mitchell on the Working Time Directive

#### 7 NEWS FOCUS

Ill-health pensions: A great injustice has been done

#### 8 AERIAL LADDER PLATFORM

A charter for change

#### 16 WHAT'S MY ROLE?

Sharon Sales-Mossop, Women's Rep, Strathclyde

#### 18 YOUR HEALTH

Breast cancer: early detection is vital

#### 19 LEGAL BEAGLE

Shift changes

#### 20 YEAR OFF

Alan Miles will spend 12 months developing FBUTUBE

#### 22 PUZZLE PAGE

Your chance to win a pair of Eurostar tickets

#### 23 STATION CAT

The news they don't want you to hear

#### 24 25-YEAR BADGES

**Win**  
**Two Eurostar**  
**tickets**  
**see p22**



**20**

Alan Miles on a year  
filming members for  
FBUTUBE



**10**

Serious injury and near-  
misses on the rise



the lack of job opportunities. Many will be increasingly concerned about the future for our children. We can expect the worsening economic crisis to lead to a further squeeze on public services, including our own. The public mood is one of growing anger. A deregulated finance sector has played a key role in creating the current situation. For the past two decades a tiny section of society has got richer and richer on the backs of the rest of us. The gap in earnings in the UK has widened for 30 years. There is a growing awareness of the huge scale of tax avoidance by large corporations and the extremely wealthy. These measures have robbed our public services of billions

of pounds every year and are one of the factors behind the attacks we face within the fire and rescue service. These facts are the background to the decision of the FBU executive council to back The People's Charter. The Charter has been drawn up by trade unionists and campaigners in an attempt to provide a voice and a focus for the anger people feel in response to the crisis in the economy. It starts from the idea that working people should not have to pay the price for a crisis they did not cause. I hope you will support it. The People's Charter (see page 8) is based around the idea that we need to be united in the face of the attacks we

may now face. United to defend jobs and services; united to protect our young people; and united to say that we should not now pay the price through increased taxation.

This message of unity is in sharp contrast to the message of hate and division which some are now attempting to promote. In the light of the growing crisis we can expect groups like the BNP to try to cash in, blaming migrants, Muslims or non-white people for a mess which was in reality created within the international banking system. Our profession is based on teamwork and on serving our communities, regardless of who they are. Our union is based on unity and solidarity, regardless of who we are. These principles, of unity and solidarity, will be absolutely essential in the difficult months ahead.

**Matt Wrack**  
General Secretary

The principles, of unity and solidarity,  
will be absolutely essential in the  
difficult months ahead



7  
Union continues  
pension fight in  
the courts

## Why we must defend our control colleagues

Having read in the pages of *Firefighter* of the Government's plans for regional controls and the threat they pose to control jobs, it was instructive to spend a day in Hertfordshire's control room in Stevenage. There I found out for myself just how professional and irreplaceable our control staff are.

The day consisted of a number of exercises. Using a board, I took responsibility for allocating resources in a variety of emergency incidents in order to test my knowledge without the aid of a mobilising system. I listened in to the operators in control receiving (some quite panic) emergency calls and the impressive and professional way they dealt with them. In another nerve-wracking exercise, I answered the radio and spoke to appliances going out. All of this is just normal practice for our control staff for whom there never seems to be a slack period. If they are not dealing with an emergency, they are dealing with numerous admin calls, police and ambulance calls and also taking the details of people seeking a Home Safety Check.

The whole experience reinforced for me just how important it is we defend our control colleagues and fight regional controls.

**Ben Read**  
Royston Fire Station

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**MARCH 2009**

→ Latest news

→ Sounding off

→ In brief



## Fire crews let down

**Union asks why the Government is still refusing a statutory duty**

### FLOODS RESPONSE

**T**he Union has criticised Government for refusing to implement the Pitt Review recommendation that the fire service be given a statutory duty to respond to widespread flooding. That refusal is leaving local fire crews struggling with significant flooding without proper equipment to enable them to work safely in water.

Issuing a statement following flash floods early February, FBU General Secretary Matt Wrack said: "Fire crews have been struggling to cope with bouts of significant flooding as they did in 2008. Fire crews have been run ragged doing the very best they can with the limited equipment, training and personnel available.

"There have been large numbers of rescues, evacuations or giving just a bit of reassurance and help to the public. We have been inundated by fire crews demanding to know when the Government is going to provide the statutory duty, funding for new kit, training and more personnel.

"It is nearly two years since the major floods of 2007 and nearly eight months since the Pitt Review reported. Fire crews feel badly let down by Government backtracking over the Pitt Review's stance that the fire service is given the legal duty to respond to flooding and the funding to go with it.

Government seemed content to "provide only enough kit and funding to meet the requirements of a photo opportunity and that is not good enough," the Union added.

Please email your MP and ask them to sign Early Day Motion 394 Flood Response and Fire And Rescue Service. This calls on "the government to introduce legislative proposals for a statutory duty on the fire and rescue service for flood rescue, supported by funding for adequate equipment and training". It takes 2 minutes. Visit [www.fbu.org.uk](http://www.fbu.org.uk) and follow the "Lobby Your MP" link.



Firefighter at Ulley dam near Rotherham, South Yorkshire, June 2007

LEWIS WHILDEN/PA PHOTOS



Flooding, Essex. February 10, 2009. The Environment Agency issued 95 flood warnings that morning

IAN NICHOLSON/PA PHOTOS



## CREWS CAMPAIGN AGAINST CUTS

Dorset Combined Fire Authority has agreed proposals from the chief fire officer to make cuts to fire and rescue cover and changes to crewing arrangements at Weymouth fire stations that will impact negatively on public safety.

The third pump is to go, crewing on an aerial appliance will be downgraded to retained and 16 frontline firefighters will be redeployed to "Community Safety Task Teams".

The decision was made despite a massive campaign in and around Weymouth by FBU members, involving a 12,000 strong petition collected while campaigning in the town, a comprehensive response document to the authority's plans and the support of local councils and a Minister of the State – Jim Knight the local MP.

The plans were drawn up in response to the sharp rise in domestic fire deaths in the county and have been

**FBU TUBE**  
www.youtube.com/fbutube

For more on the Weymouth campaign

hugely controversial.

Says FBU Regional Secretary John Drake:

"Dorset members feel totally let down by their fire authority and are currently considering their next steps."

"It is becoming apparent in the South West that the mantra is 'You can have Community Safety teams or you can have front line firefighters but you can't have both!'"

## Scrap PFI plan, say fire crews

### NORTHUMBERLAND

**N**orthumberland fire crews say council-lors should scrap a PFI-backed plan because taxpayers could be left with an expensive way of paying for a worse fire service. The plans would see the loss of two fire stations and 28 – or one in six – of Northumberland's frontline firefighters.

The union is calling for a re-think of three-year-old County Council backed plans to close fire stations at Blyth, Cramlington, Ashington and Morpeth. Two PFI-funded fire stations would be built in Pegswood and West Hartford.

The Union issued the call to council-lors ahead of a county council meeting on

11 February. Union leaders say the three-year-old plans are outdated and out of touch with today's economic reality.

Colin James, FBU Brigade Secretary said: "It might make sense to those financial institutions making profits from providing the PFI money and to those who want cuts to local fire services. But it does not make sense for local public services, local fire crews or the taxpayers who will be footing the bill.

"The current reality is that we are in a recession and can't afford grandiose PFI-backed schemes.

"PFI deals tie public finances into a rigid and expensive long-term contract. We are burdening future generations with

**This is an expensive way of paying for a worse fire service**

long-term debt to fund new buildings delivering a worse fire service.

"Let's invest in first class public services. But let's make sure we're getting much better value for money than this deal will provide, not an expensive deal part-funded by major cuts to front line services."

PFI deals make fat cats but burden future generations with debt



## Sounding off!

**TAM MITCHELL**

EC Member, Retained

### Working Time Directive

The end of the UK opt-out on the Working Time Directive (WTD) on the 48 hour week has been presented in the media by some organisations in the fire service as an attack on the retained duty system and retained firefighters. But the difficulties are being wildly exaggerated.

This is about stopping an excessive hours culture that is bad for the health and safety of all workers. Long hours increase the risk of developing ill-health and loss of concentration is associated with unnecessary accidents. Firefighters face enough inherent risks without being exposed to additional dangers. And that's why the FBU – along with other TUC-affiliated unions in the UK, support the change.

So let's look at the facts.

The fire service has some seasonal peaks and troughs in demand. The WTD sets the averaging period for the 48 hour week at 26 weeks in sectors where continuity of service is needed, so there would still be a great deal of operational flexibility.

The directive does not apply in emergency



PAUL BOX/REPORTDIGITAL.CO.UK

situations, such as when property, life and limb are at risk. No firefighter would be stopped from doing their job, and the service would be able to waive the 48 hour week in a wide range of emergency situations, including temporary staff shortages and periods of severe weather.

And the fact is recent surveys\* show that an average retained firefighter works 47.7 hours per week in all their jobs, which is within the limit set by the working time directive. A very small number of retained firefighters who currently work very long hours might have to choose to reduce the amount of overtime in their main jobs.

Furthermore, this can potentially be managed by minor adjustments. Fire authorities could assist in managing any transition by ensuring they have the correct number of wholetime and retained firefighters in their establishment rather than operating with built-in shortages of firefighters.

There is still a UK-wide shortage of retained firefighters of somewhere between 3,000 and 5,000. By addressing recruitment and retention, the time pressure on other retained firefighters would be eased.

\* ONS Labour Force Survey Microdata Service, Summer 2008; LFS Microdata Service, Summer 2008

## In brief

◆ A new multi-million pound plan for York's fire services will waste money and not solve the underlying problems of recruiting and keeping firefighters working on the retained duty system, says the Union. The scheme, estimated to cost between £3.5 million and £5 million, involves building a new fire station to the south of the City near the University. The Union has warned that suggestions about recruiting students to work as retained firefighters at the proposed new fire station are unrealistic.

◆ Legal moves by the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead Council to halt the closure of Windsor fire station at night were to reach the High Court in London on the 17 February 2009, as Firefighter went to press. It is seeking a judicial review arguing that Royal Berkshire FRS failed to undertake a proper public consultation and also failed to adequately assess the risks surrounding a closure. More: [www.windsorfirestation.co.uk](http://www.windsorfirestation.co.uk)

Firefighters at a blaze at Larbert house in the grounds of the Royal Scottish National Hospital, 1 January 2007



CENTRAL SCOTLAND FIRE BRIGADE/PA

## Union welcomes boost in firefighter numbers

### CENTRAL SCOTLAND

**C**entral Scotland Fire and Rescue Service has announced plans to increase the number of firefighters in its ranks.

Four wholetime firefighters will be recruited and volunteers in rural Crianlarich and Tyndrum in north Stirlingshire will join the retained duty system.

There are currently about 200 wholetime and 150 retained firefighters serving in the Central brigade.

Gordon McQuade, secretary to the FBU in Central Scotland, welcomed the move: "We are delighted that these savings will now be invested in recruiting more front-line firefighters which are badly needed to deal with the huge number of new duties that have been placed on fire and rescue services in Scotland.

"We are also delighted at the news that our colleagues in both Tyndrum and Crianlarich will change from volunteer status to retained firefighters bringing them in line with all other firefighters who serve our rural communities."

### CHANNEL TUNNEL

## EUROTUNNEL TO FIT SPRINKLER SYSTEM

The Channel Tunnel is to have a sprinkler system fitted after the third fire in 12 years. The development follows lobbying efforts by the FBU to improve the safety of the travelling public and firefighters responding to fires in the submarine rail link between Britain and France.

The FBU has for many years argued for better fire safety provision, including sprinklers, and stepped up its campaign in the wake of the latest fire in September 2008.

As part of the FBU campaign National Officer John McGhee met with the head of the Channel Tunnel Intergovernmental Commission in November 2008 and raised the issue on national radio. The Union also liaised with the French firefighters' union, SNSPP.

The sprinkler system, by preventing fires from spreading out of control, will allow time for fire crews to get to the scene via the service tunnel. In the fires in 1996 and in September, firefighters arrived too late to prevent severe damage.

Eurotunnel spent years considering, then testing, sprinkler systems after the previous fires. But it refused to pay for a system to be installed and claimed that the risk of a similar fire was remote.



Eurotunnel, French minister with French firefighters.



TV chef Heston Blumenthal supports the FBU campaign

◆ The Union is urging members to attend a lobby of parliament on the afternoon of Wednesday 11 March to raise the need for urgent action to be taken by the British government to address the horrific humanitarian crisis that has been forced upon the people of Gaza. Israel's war on 1.5 million people in Gaza killed over 1,300, including 431 children, and injured over 5,300, including 1,872 children. Gaza's infrastructure has been destroyed, and hospitals and schools have been bombed. More info: [www.palestinecampaign.org](http://www.palestinecampaign.org)



LANDOV/PA PHOTOS



General Secretary Matt Wrack (far left), London Regional Secretary Joe McVeigh, London members Martin Marrion and Andrew Scott and National Officer Sean Starbuck outside the High Court in London, 13 January 2009



# 'A great injustice has been done'

**Treatment of disabled firefighters 'cruel', Union tells court**

## PENSIONS

It is the Government's aim to leave disabled firefighters without a job or a pension, and that was the change to the new pensions guidance of 2006, Government lawyers made clear to the Court of Appeal. The admission came in the final afternoon of an FBU-backed appeal on behalf of three firefighters who had their pensions removed.

The guidance issued in 2006 by the Department for Communities and Local Government attempts to change the rules to make it impossible for a disabled or injured firefighter to get a pension. If there was no

suitable alternative job, they would be sacked.

The admissions in court fly in the face of repeated ministerial statements, including one to Parliament, that this was not the Government's aim. One of the judges questioned whether abandoning that position in the court "came close to undermining the democratic process".

The blunt admission that there would be "no job, no pension" for disabled firefighters came during a bruising session on the final day of the union's appeal. Government lawyers struggled to explain how their legal position had reversed from the one originally lodged with the court in which they accepted

much of the union's case.

Their lawyers accepted the Government position lacked consistency and "there have been various expressions of view" and it was "regrettable the Secretary of State had not adopted a consistent approach." Despite this, they asserted that disabled firefighters would get statutory redundancy and payment in lieu of notice, but no pension.

They set out the new position: "If there isn't a job and a firefighter is not permanently disabled then he will be in a position that there is neither a job nor a pension." That, they said, was the change within the 2006 guidance which the Government now stood by.

The Government had produced even more new guidance in 2008, which replaced the 2006 guidance. The Government lawyer was "in some difficulty in explaining the timing of the issue of the 2008 guidance" given the Government was, in effect, telling the court it was wrong.

The lack of any logic in backing the position set out in the 2006 guidance, while having changed it again in 2008 was pounced

**One judge questioned whether abandoning the position in court 'came close to undermining the democratic process'**

on by one of the judges. Judge: "The current guidance is grievously in error". Government lawyer: "Yes, it is wrong, yes".

Judge: "Has it been withdrawn?" Government lawyer: "No".

Another judge had also homed in on the change between the guidance in 2004 and that issued in 2006. "You have permanent disability up to 2004," he pointed out, "then you decide that for a firefighter, who leads a perilous life, that is no longer the case. It is strange you now assert that."

The Court of Appeal hopes to produce its written decision in the next few months.

A great injustice has been done to three firefighters who had their pensions removed, the Court of Appeal was told by lawyers for the FBU. The treatment of the three firefighters has been "cruel".

All three had their pensions removed completely when they lodged appeals against parts of their individual awards. None had been aware that lodging an appeal risked the entire pension, and were the first three to have suffered in this way.



**For more on the Appeal Court hearing**



## A charter for change

Britain is in the grip of an economic crisis. So is the world.

Every time there is a slump the politicians and financiers seem mystified as to how the system has failed. But boom and bust is the way it works. It's not stable.

When the economy grows, banks, corporations and speculators, driven only by greed, gamble other people's money in their global casino. When they lose 'confidence' in their profit making schemes and panic, the bubble bursts and we pay the price.

Redundancies throw hundreds of thousands onto the dole. Savings are lost. Homes are repossessed. Pensions lose value. Workers are put on short time. Wages and conditions are cut. Public services are slashed.

Government is spending billions of

pounds of our money bailing the banks and big business out of their crisis.

It's not right and we didn't vote for it.

Those billions of pounds are our money. And our children's. We want that money better spent.

We have launched a **People's Charter**. It sets out what must be done to get out of this crisis and put the people first, before the interests of bankers and speculators.

We need **one million signatures** to show we mean business. So sign and support the Charter – online, at work, in your community.

Together we can get the changes we need. **Can we do it? Yes we can!**

### **1 A fair economy for a fairer Britain.**

Take the leading banking, insurance and mortgage industries fully into democratic

public ownership run for the benefit of all. Regain control of the Bank of England and keep interest rates low. Tightly regulate the City markets to facilitate lending and to stop speculation and takeovers against the public interest. Ban hedge funds, raids on pension funds, asset-stripping and corporate tax loopholes. Restructure the tax system so big business and the wealthy pay more and ordinary people pay less.

**2 More and better jobs.** Existing jobs must be protected. Public and private investment must create new jobs paying decent money. In particular in manufacturing, construction and green technology. More jobs mean more spending power to stimulate the economy, increased tax revenue and fewer people on benefit. Build full employment. Reduce hours, not





pay, to create more jobs. Raise the minimum wage to half national median earnings and end the lower rate for young workers.

**3 Decent homes for all.** Stop the repossessions and keep people in their homes. Offer 'no interest' loans. Control rents. We need 3 million new homes. Give local government the power and money to build and renovate affordable quality homes and buy empty ones, ending the housing shortage, and creating jobs.

**4 Protect and improve our public services – no cuts.** Save public money: bring energy, transport, water, post and telecommunications back into public ownership. End corporate profiteering in health, education, social and other public services. Stop the EU privatisation Directives.

**5 Fairness and Justice.** Free heating and transport for every pensioner. Link state pensions and benefits to average earnings. Protect pension schemes and restore the lost value of private pensions. End child poverty by increasing child benefits and tax credits and providing free nurseries and crèches. Enforce equal pay for women. End racism and discrimination in all its forms. No scapegoating of migrant workers. Invest in young people and give them a real stake in the future. Provide youth, community, arts and cultural centres, sports facilities, and clubs for all. Guarantee training, apprenticeships and education with grants for everyone and no fees. Restore union

rights to allow them the freedom to fight the crisis and to protect workers.

**6 Build a secure and sustainable future for all.** End the cost of war in blood and money. Bring our troops home. Don't waste billions on a new generation of nuclear weapons. And beyond the current economic disaster, climate change threatens us all. Our future must be based on massive investment for a greener, safer world now. Debt is crushing millions of people forcing them to move and producing war, famine and misery. Get rid of the debt economy in Britain and cancel the debts of the poor of the planet. A better future for all the people of the world.

**SIGN  
NOW!**

Visit [www.thepeoplescharter.com](http://www.thepeoplescharter.com) or email [info@thepeoplescharter.com](mailto:info@thepeoplescharter.com)



Firefighters, teachers and  
other public sector workers  
striking for better pay

PAUL MATTSSON/REPORTDIGITAL.CO.UK



## Record levels of major injuries underline concerns that safety in the fire service is taking a back seat

**T**he number of serious injuries sustained by firefighters in England is running at record levels, new government figures show, underlining concerns expressed by fire crews that their safety is being compromised.

The data, published in December by the department of Communities and Local Government, shows that in 2007/8 106 firefighters suffered injuries such as bone fractures, burns, sight loss and toxic exposure.

The number of "RIDDOR" major injuries exceeded 100 for a second year running in 2007/8, hitting a record high of 113 a year earlier, according to available CLG Operational Statistics reports comprising figures going back to 2001/2.

In a further indication of a weakening safety record, available statistics from Scotland show near-misses are also running at record highs.

The number of incidents that could have ended up as a tragedy for Scottish firefighters stood at 529 in 2007/8, the highest level for at least seven years, according to a new report by Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Fire Services in Scotland.

And these figures – relating to unplanned events that did not result in injury, illness or damage – but had the potential to do so – almost certainly underestimate the true scale of the problem, as many near misses are not recorded.

The CLG does not publish figures on near misses, or dangerous occurrences.

### For every near-miss reported, 4 or 5 are not

Colin James, Northumberland brigade secretary, said: "The whole flooding incident at Morpeth in September last year was a near miss. We had firefighters who got into trouble in the water because they hadn't been properly trained or they didn't have the right equipment."

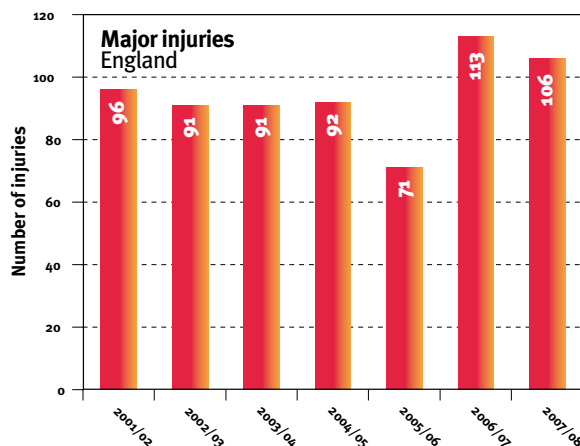
"At first there were no reported accidents or near-misses and management were very pleased with themselves. Subsequently, one near-miss was reported, but we know there were many, many more than that. For every near-miss that is reported, there are at four or five that aren't."

"Some firefighters were wading through the streets in water when they got carried away by a sudden surge and had to hang on to anything they could, a lamppost, anything, until other crew members were able to throw them a line. Then there's all the problems afterwards, the after-effects of being in contaminated water. None of this was taken into account."

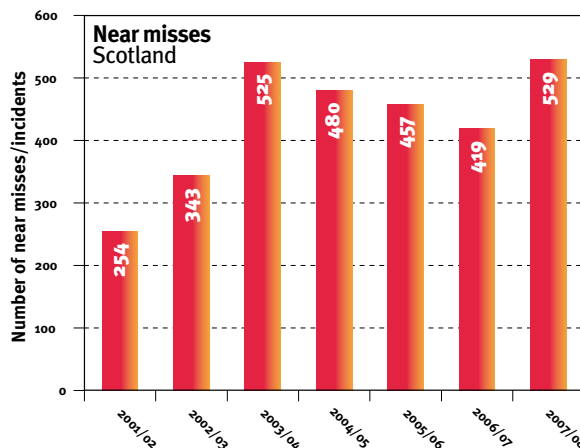
Says Ian Dick, who, as health and safety rep, supports members in Northumberland alongside Colin: "Near misses and dangerous occurrences are important as they are precursors of more serious accidents."

"The more these are investigated and solutions found, such as appropriate amendments to policy and procedures from training to risk assessments, the less chance there is of a brigade FBU official having to tell the relative of a firefighter that their son, daughter, husband or wife has been killed in the line of duty."

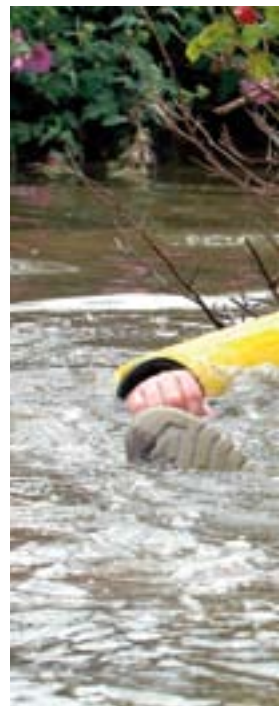
# Serious injuries reach record levels



Source: CLG FRS Operational Statistics 2007/8



Source: Her Majesty's Inspector of Fire Services for Scotland







Firefighters tackle a February 2009 blaze in a six-storey office building in central London

CLIVE GEE/PA PHOTOS



ANNA GOWTHORPE/PA PHOTOS

A firefighter in flood waters during a pump-out operation in Toll Bar near Doncaster in July 2007 – proper equipment and training for dealing with floods is still not available countrywide

## UNION SAFETY CAMPAIGN MAKES GREAT STRIDES

Following the lobby of Parliament and the launch of the Union's report on firefighter fatalities, *In the Line of Duty* last November, the campaign has made great strides:

### Recording of fatal and other serious incidents

In response to the Union's report, CLG Minister Sadiq Khan has agreed to review the current arrangements for the recording of fatalities. This will include dialogue with all stakeholders and with the authorities in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. The Union will also be raising this matter at the next meeting of the CLG advisory body, the Practitioners' Forum.

### Investigation of fatalities and other serious incidents

The Chief Fire and Rescue Advisor (CFRA) in England has been asked by the Minister to consider this issue and we are currently awaiting an initial response and proposals.

### Improvements to the process for issuing operational guidance

Proposals have been developed for a new operational guidance framework. This would ensure the development of key guidance on all operational matters as a result of incidents, new risks or as a result of updated technical knowledge. The Union would be involved in this process throughout. The FBU has raised concerns about the application of such guidance in different parts of the UK in the light of the fact that firefighters have frequently been required to work across borders. As a result of this discussion, it has been agreed that this process would produce UK-wide guidance. The FBU has welcomed this very significant step but will monitor the process closely.

### Improvements in the provision of training

CLG has initiated a review of the processes for the provision of operational training. This work will

## INVEST IN SAFETY



**SAFER  
FIREFIGHTERS  
SAFER  
COMMUNITIES**

examine the extent to which the integrated personal development system (IPDS) has been implemented within individual fire and rescue services, the impact of IRMP on the provision of training and the processes for the development of training. This is an area on which many FBU members have expressed concern. The Union believes, for example, that there is a range of problems related to the implementation of IPDS. This work by CLG will allow the FBU at national and local level to raise these concerns. We have ensured that the views of frontline firefighters, both wholetime and RDS, are sought locally by the researchers. This project offers the opportunity

to assess the current regimes for training and development and for members to raise concerns about these as appropriate.

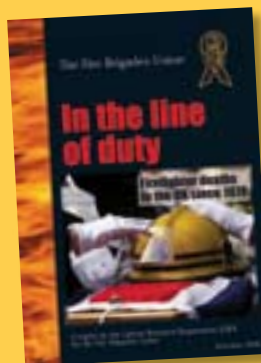
Says General Secretary Matt Wrack: "In all the key areas identified by our report, *In the Line of Duty*, and pursued by our campaign, there has been movement from Government.

"This demonstrates the effectiveness of the work which so many members and officials have undertaken.

"The proposals outlined do not solve the problems we have identified.

"But they do offer us the opportunity at all levels to raise the concerns which have been raised with us by FBU members during this campaign. This will help us identify ways forward, which can improve safety for our members and for the public."

→ Take two minutes to protect your colleagues! Email your MP now and ask them to sign Early Day Motion 174 Firefighter Safety. Visit: [www.fbu.org.uk](http://www.fbu.org.uk) and follow the "Lobby Your MP" link.



## HSE TO BEGIN PROACTIVE INSPECTIONS OF FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICES

To help tackle the issue of injuries at work, the Union has been pressing the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) to carry out proactive inspections of fire and rescue services.

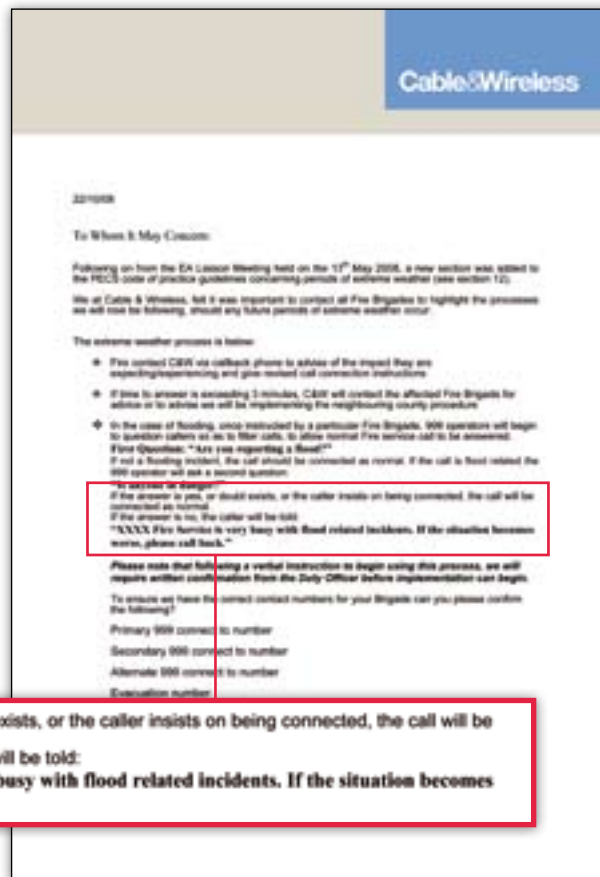
In a significant breakthrough in this two-year campaign, the HSE will this

April start a programme of inspections of up to eight fire and rescue authorities.

Says John McGhee, FBU national officer responsible for health, safety and welfare: "It is unacceptable that so many FBU members suffer injuries at work. It is doubly concerning that serious injuries are on the

rise. We believe a proper inspection regime of the fire service will cut injuries and we have been working hard to bring this about. It is excellent news for FBU members that this campaign has been successful in galvanising the Health and Safety Executive into action."

**LETTER** Sent to fire controls, it sets out a new and unpublicised change to the public emergency communications system (PECS), which receives all 999 calls before putting them through to emergency services.



**S**tandard 999 telephone operators are to be used to filter and queue emergency calls to the fire service. For the first time ever callers asking for the fire service at busy times will face a series of questions which could result in them being told "the fire service is busy ... please call back".

The unpublicised move comes only months before the first regional control centres (RCCs) were meant to start going live. Regional control start dates have now been delayed by a further nine months.

There has been no public announcement of this and no mention in any of the FireControl business cases, although the change was agreed as far back as May 2008, before either were published. The latest business case even claims that the planned regional controls could handle "superspate", conditions with a third fewer staff.

That claim flies in the face of Parliamentary Answers that have demonstrated a very low call handling capability for the RCCs, because so few staff will be employed. No mention is made in the business case of call filtering and queuing by telecoms operators.

The FBU was alerted by a letter sent to fire controls by Cable and Wireless in late October 2008 regarding changes to the public emergency communications system (PECS) which receives all 999 calls before putting them through to fire, police, ambulance or coastguard. The letter sets out a new and unpublicised change to the PECS guidelines agreed at an Emergency Authority (EA) meeting in May 2008.

While only explicitly referring to incidents for extreme weather, for which the fire

In an unpublicised move, under Government plans for a regional control system callers asking for the fire service at busy times will for the first time ever face a series of questions which could result in them being told "the fire service is busy ...

**"please call back"**



service still has no statutory duty, it sets out how 999 telecoms operators will filter 999 calls intended for the fire service. The phrase to be finally used with some callers who do not get their answers 'correct' is "The Fire Service is very busy with flood related incidents. If the situation becomes worse, please call back."

Sharon Riley, FBU Executive Council member for control said: "The fact that Government smuggled the change through without making it public speaks volumes. This will be dressed up as being aimed at existing controls, but the timing is critical."

"It was a matter of only months before the first FRS controls were meant to start moving to Regional Controls and we believe that is the underlying reason for the change. The key question is why change guidelines only months before the £1.4 billion regional control systems were to start to go live?"

"Regional controls are not meant just to match the current system, Government has claimed they will be much better. Regional controls have been heralded as being much better and much more resilient, especially when we hit spate conditions."

"To us, this change is the first clear indication that the fire service is being asked to adapt to the limitations of regional controls. If the system was much better as claimed, we would not need telecoms operators to filter and queue calls. This dumbing down poses dangers for the public, the fire service and for the 999 telephone operators. It takes at least two years to become competent in emergency fire control work, you can't teach our knowledge to a BT operator, that takes day-to-day experience gained over years."



**FLOOD** Part of the flooded village of Catcliffe, South Yorkshire in June 2007

"In the real world people calling 999 in panic will say anything to get through to the right person, it doesn't happen in the way this letter sets out. We can 'call challenge' and filter and queue calls but we are trained and have years of expertise and fire and rescue knowledge."

"The public will be asked to self-assess the level of danger they think they might be in. That may not always be clear to them, especially where there is a widespread emergency such as that caused by extreme weather."

The news came as new question marks appeared over the repeated boasts of Government that the regional control system must work because it uses "tried and tested" technology. Only months before the system was to start going live, "technical problems" have delayed the project for at least another nine months.

And delays cost money, lots of it, at a time when fire services are cutting back because of a budget squeeze. Government is also dragging its feet over providing the money to equip the fire service to deal with widespread

flooding incidents.

All the regional control buildings, with the exception of London, have been built by the private developers who rent the buildings back to the Government and then regional fire control companies. The long-rent leases have been signed for between 20 years and 25 years after which the buildings return to the developers.

The rents are now being paid and will continue to be paid. The series of delays have seen the rents being handed over for empty buildings, although there have been a few 'fig leaf' meetings and events at some of the buildings.

The current rental costs are running at around £750,000 a month, £9 million a year (*Written parliamentary answer, 10 December 2008, No. 241298*). This will soon rise to around £1.1 million a month, £13.2 million a year and that excludes London's costs.

Adrian Clarke, FBU regional secretary for East of England, says the news has caused uproar across his region. "There is no one in this region even trying to justify what is happening with regional controls."

"We've been dealing with the aftermath of major flooding and there still isn't the money from Government to pay for basic equipment to protect us when we're in flood water. But the Government has money to burn to pay for empty buildings that no one wants."

"Government has tried to justify it by saying there are meetings in the buildings. Well you don't pay £85,000 monthly rent for a massive building so six people can use it to meet every three months. It is ridiculous, it's a smoke-screen and everyone has seen through it."

# call back"

# CUTS DO HIT SAFETY

The Audit Commission claims that further cuts can be made to the fire service without undermining community safety. But the evidence – much of it from the Commission itself – shows that this is not true

**G**reater Manchester Fire and Rescue Service should have got a pat on the back from the Audit Commission. After all, it made a colossal £29 million in efficiency savings during the four years to 2006-7, the second highest amount in the country. But as it slashed its budget, downsizing front-line emergency response, the brigade has fallen short of a key government target on fire deaths.

The revelation follows a new report by the Audit Commission on England's fire and rescue services that recommends brigades, after slashing £200 million from budgets between 2004 and 2008, do the same again. Changes such as staffing stations only during the day, cutting the number of engines on call at night and using smaller, cheaper appliances requiring 2-3 crew members instead of 4-5 can be achieved "without compromising safety," it claimed.

The December report by the "independent" Audit Commission was immediately welcomed without reservation by the department of Communities and Local Government.

But Greater Manchester, only beaten by London in terms of savings made, missed a key public service agreement (PSA) target for 2007-8 of no more than 1.25 the national average of fire deaths in dwelling for each 100,000 of the population, a parliamentary answer has revealed (*see table, right*).

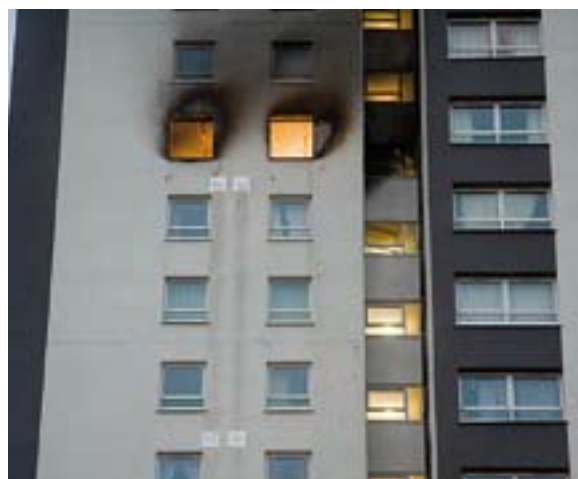
In addition, West Yorkshire and South Yorkshire – which have made large budget cuts resulting in reductions in front line cover – fell short of the target. Although fire deaths have fallen overall, these three fire and rescue services, as well as Lancashire and Northumberland, have failed to keep pace with the reducing national average.

## Shocking contradictions

This is the second year running that Greater Manchester, South Yorkshire and Lancashire have missed this target (*see box, right*). Merseyside, which at £15.1 million, made the third largest budget cuts in England, missed the target too in 2006-7.

But this is not the only evidence underlining shocking contradictions between what the Audit Commission says and the reality on the ground in the fire service.

A separate report by the Audit Commission itself – kept secret until the Union made a freedom of information request – has found some of its most celebrated budget-



Blaze in a tower block

PA PHOTOS





SHOUT/REPORTDIGITAL.CO.UK

	FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY	EFFICIENCY SAVINGS* (£)	ACCIDENTAL FIRE DEATH PSA TARGET
1	London	33,457,000	PASSED
2	Greater Manchester	29,414,000	FAILED
3	Merseyside	15,140,000	PASSED**
4	West Yorkshire	10,347,000	FAILED
5	West Midlands	7,734,000	PASSED
6	Lancashire	5,732,000	FAILED
7	South Yorkshire	5,518,000	FAILED
8	Avon	5,460,000	PASSED
9	Kent and Medway	5,285,000	PASSED
10	Tyne and Wear	5,125,000	PASSED

**NOTES:** \* Cash-releasing efficiency savings across the period 2004-08  
 \*\* failed in the previous year  
**SOURCE:** Parliamentary answers 26 January 2009 [250703] and 27 January 2009 [250702]

cutters failing on their safety record.

Spot checks for Greater Manchester revealed “evidence that the arrangements to maintain adequate crewing levels at stations identified within the FRA’s IRMP are not being achieved,” and “the service has identified that it will maintain crewing levels of five personnel on the first appliance on all occasions but evidence shows that this level is not being attained on an increasing percentage of occasions over the last two years.” It also found “deficiencies” in training that “may be leaving some operational staff exposed to risk”.

Perversely though, the Audit Commission gave Greater Manchester a top rating of “strongly/strongly” for the brigade’s emergency response and training.

Perhaps encouraged by this, senior managers at Greater Manchester are now planning another round of cuts. In a move fiercely resisted by the Union, fire authority councillors are being asked to rubber-stamp the loss of another 50 frontline firefighter posts, bringing the total number of lost firefighter posts in the brigade to 475 since 2002.

### ‘Mindboggling’

FBU General Secretary Matt Wrack said: “The Audit Commission congratulates top management for slashing budgets and recommends more of the same.

“But at the same time it admits that cuts are increasing the risk to fire crews.

“It’s mindboggling that the Audit Commission says that budget cuts won’t compromise safety while their own private reports say otherwise.

“The idea that the fire service should be taking advice from such an organisation is deeply worrying.

“If this is the best they can do, the Government should wrap up the Audit Commission and save taxpayers a lot of money.”

“... The floor target is that no fire and rescue authority should have more than 1.25 times the national average for accidental fire deaths. For the 12 months from September 2005 to September 2006, four Fire and Rescue Authorities were over the 1.25 floor target threshold. These were Merseyside, Greater Manchester, South Yorkshire, and Lancashire...”

(DCLG memorandum to the Communities and Local Government Committee on the Departmental Annual Report 2007, Public Service Agreements – PSA3 Fire Deaths Reduction Target. Written Evidence to the Select Committee on Communities and Local Government Committee.)

Blaze in a house

## AUDIT COMMISSION LOSES TAXPAYERS’ MONEY IN ICELAND

The Audit Commission, the watchdog that conducted an inquiry into local authorities’ decisions to invest in Icelandic banks, has admitted it also lost £10m of taxpayers’ money in the country’s banks.

The Audit Commission’s job is to ensure public sector spending – including the fire service – provides “value for taxpayers”.

It said its £10m deposits in Landsbanki and Heritable Bank were in “full compliance” with its guidelines

“on prudent investment”.

The admission is embarrassing for the body established to ensure greater efficiency and value for money in the delivery of fire services and public services.

The Audit Commission audited itself on the debacle.

According to a press release, it was “a thorough and rigorous investigation, as rigorous as any that we would expect audited and inspected bodies to undergo”.



## WHAT'S MY ROLE?

**Sharon Sales-Mossop  
Women's Rep,  
Strathclyde**

**T**he National Women's Committee – with a rep from each region – is ten years old this year and has grown to play an increasingly vital role in advancing equality in the Union.

Women from across the UK will be attending the annual women's school in early April. There are now women's reps in most brigades, helping to build the Union. So what exactly is their role?

Sharon Sales-Mossop, women's rep for Strathclyde brigade, has experienced many facets of fire service life. She has worked in control, spent some years as a frontline firefighter and now works in fire safety.

And she admits that if it wasn't for the NWC she would probably have left the job quite early in her career, when she was experiencing problems at work. West Midlands NWC rep Helen Harrison helped get it sorted – and, through her professionalism and encouragement, whetted Sharon's appetite to get active in the Union herself.

Sharon went along to the annual women's conference and, like many before and after her, was inspired by what she found.

"When I met up with all those other women, I didn't feel isolated or alone any more. It was a very supportive network and one that all women in the FBU can draw on. I felt I had to get involved. There was a vacancy for women's rep in Warwickshire so I went for it. I found I was pregnant not long after then, and dealt with the maternity policy. I had my son and moved to Scotland."

### **Enthusiast**

Sharon is a great enthusiast for the NWC, the networking opportunities at the women's conference and across the region. She is now vice-chair of the Scottish women's committee, where reps from the eight brigades in the country meet four times a year. Denise Christie, the capable and

**'We are still fighting for simple things – a uniform that fits, decent maternity leave and welfare facilities in stations'**





energetic NWC rep from Scotland, plays a key role. The ultimate aim, says Sharon, is to get the best policies and procedures – from maternity deals to improved facilities – adopted across all brigades in the region.

Women are, she argues, an integral part of the Union – but women's reps and the NWC have a unique contribution to make in pressing for improvements in areas that impact most acutely on women members. "We are still fighting for simple things – a uniform that fits, decent maternity leave and welfare facilities in stations." Sharon invokes the image of a department store to explain. "You don't go to the lingerie department if you want a pair of trainers. That's how I feel about sections in the Union. They are there for a specific purpose, but we're all together in one Union."

Sharon has a personal track record of pressing for change to improve the working lives of female firefighters. When in Warwickshire, she came up with the idea of a "welfare pack to be carried on every pumping appliance, containing tampons, towels and wipes. It was not taken up – but

a decade later Strathclyde Fire and Rescue have agreed to procure the packs.

As women's rep, Sharon sees herself as very much part of the Strathclyde FBU team, whose members share her passion for getting better facilities, not just for women but for all members in the brigade and beyond. Strathclyde FRS is among the first in the UK to get a "dignity vehicle" for crews at the fireground. And, of course, there's Sharon's welfare pack in the procurement pipeline too. Sharon was among the Strathclyde delegation at last year's annual conference – which shows how much her contribution is valued by Union colleagues.

When relations between colleagues – or managers – are not so amicable, women's reps can be the first point of contact for women members seeking help – along with regional NWC reps. As many women can attest, Kerry Baigent, the tireless NWC secretary, has dossiers of best practice at her fingertips and knows all about grievance procedures if necessary.

### Women and the Union

The message is that women have a full role to play in the Union and, despite making up only three per cent of the workforce at the moment, needn't feel isolated. Women's reps and the NWC are there to help and nurture women members. With government targets for new recruits, many more women should be joining the Fire and Rescue Service over the next few years, so the NWC can expect to grow in size and influence.

Crucially, the whole Union is benefiting from the energy and resourcefulness of the NWC and women's reps, in advancing the cause of equality at work. It is something the FBU leadership well recognise. Vicky Knight has represented the NWC on the Union's executive council since 2002. At this year's conference, for the first time, the NWC will be able to submit emergency motions. It has truly come of age. And it is women reps on the ground such as Sharon Sales Mossop who are playing a vital role within the Union.



A video on Sharon and NWC coming soon.

## Working For You



### ANDY PRICE

Brigade Chair, Cheshire

Firefighters in Cheshire are stepping up their campaign against cuts to Wilmslow fire station ahead of a crunch fire authority meeting on 11 March. The plans would see a downgrade at night-time – 7.30pm to 7.30 am – to retained cover. At present Wilmslow is covered by one appliance with wholetime firefighters on duty at the fire station, 24/7.

The changes will lengthen fire service response times to Wilmslow by 5-6 minutes, compromising firefighter and public safety.

Wilmslow firefighters have been working flat out to get the message across to the local community and politicians.

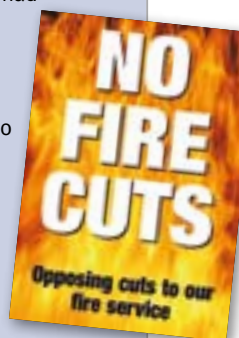
As *Firefighter* went to press they had already handed out some 5,000 leaflets and a further 10,000 are to be distributed with the help of members from all over Cheshire who are coming down to Wilmslow for a day of action on 28 February.

Two "public" meetings – organised by the service – have taken place since the plans were announced. The first was not advertised and, unsurprisingly, just one person turned up. The second was advertised, but still only 13 people turned up, and this despite the chief, two deputy chiefs, an area manager, one station manager and the chair of the authority making an appearance. The brigade is clearly worried about our campaign and has bankrolled leaflets for all residents to counter our arguments with their spin.

Fire authority councillors, meanwhile, have been asking for information on attendance times from officers, following a great number of emails received from members of the public.

The local press has taken a strong interest in our campaign and we even have Shadow Chancellor and local MP George Osborne on side. Meanwhile, firefighters from Manchester airport who live in the area have pledged not to apply for any retained posts in support of our campaign.

The campaign has galvanised members at Wilmslow. There were no reps at the beginning of last year, but now it is a thriving branch with all 21 members leading the campaign.



# Early detection is vital

More than 45,500 women and 300 men in the UK are diagnosed annually

## BREAST CANCER

**E**very year more than 45,500 women and 300 men in the UK are diagnosed with breast cancer. Thanks to research, treatment has steadily improved over the last 30 years and more patients than ever before are surviving. 70 per cent of women live at least 10 years after diagnosis.

But early detection is vital. And that is why the cancer screening programme is so important.

Not only have treatments improved but we are learning more about how lifestyle factors affect breast cancer risk. We know that taking hormone replacement therapy (HRT) for long periods increases risk and, for postmenopausal women, being overweight or obese increases risk by 30 per cent.

### BE BREAST AWARE

- ◆ Know what is normal for you
- ◆ Look at and feel your breasts
- ◆ Know what changes to look for
- ◆ Report any changes without delay
- ◆ Go for breast screening if you are over 50

Having an active life and taking plenty of exercise can reduce risk.

Research has shown that drinking the equivalent of a large glass of wine every day can increase breast cancer risk by more than 7 per cent.

Having children later in life also increases risk but breastfeeding reduces it. A strong family history can also play a part.

Around 80 per cent of breast cancers occur in people over 50. Screening invitations are sent out to women from the age

of 50 every three years until the age of 70. Women over 70 can continue to be screened regularly by booking appointments with their local breast screening unit.

It is extremely important to be breast aware. Things to look for include changes in the size, shape or feel of breasts, a new lump or thickening in one breast or armpit, any puckering, dimpling or redness of the skin, changes in the position of the nipple, a rash or nipple discharge, a new lump in the breast area, pain or discomfort that is new and felt only on one side of the breast. The commonest symptom for men is a lump.

➔ More info: [www.cancerhelp.org.uk](http://www.cancerhelp.org.uk) or call Cancer Research UK's team of specialist nurses on freephone 0808 800 4040. Lines are open Monday to Friday, between 9am and 5pm. To find out how to support the charity, call 020 7009 8820 or visit [www.cancerresearchuk.org](http://www.cancerresearchuk.org).

Cancer Research UK, the largest single funder of breast cancer research in the UK, spent around £45 million on research into the disease last year.

Teams of scientists across the country are dedicated to improving our understanding of the causes of breast cancer and investigating new ways to prevent, diagnose and treat the disease. They are also helping to improve the quality of life for women living with breast cancer.

◆ In a groundbreaking international study involving nearly 50,000 women Cancer Research UK scientists isolated five regions of the genome containing genes that can increase a woman's risk of developing the disease.

◆ They reported that breast cancer screening in East Anglia has cut deaths from the disease by nearly half – the strongest evidence yet that screening programmes save lives.

◆ The charity found that black women were around 20 years younger than white women at the time of diagnosis in a study of black cancer patients in Hackney.

◆ It suggested that survival rates for breast cancer in older women could be significantly improved by a simple awareness programme that promotes early detection.



Patient undergoing a gamma camera scan of her breast to check for cancer

MAURO FERRARELLO/SCIENCE PHOTO LIBRARY



## Imposing shift changes

**Q** New shift changes are being imposed on us. I have heard that this means we will all be sacked and reinstated with new contracts. Is this correct and what can we do about it?

**A** brigade which needs to gain agreement from its employees to implement a new shift pattern but is unable to do so may choose to dismiss all existing employees with due notice and to re-engage them on new terms and conditions which incorporate the new shift pattern it wants to implement. But this is an extreme step for any employer to take and is very rare in the fire service and in the public sector generally.

If a brigade did dismiss the workforce, it might then be possible to bring claims for unfair dismissal even if the employees worked the changes to terms and conditions – although employees in this situation should make clear that they do not accept the new working arrangements.

In these circumstances an employer will usually rely upon the statutory reason for dismissal as being “some other substantial reason”.

In order to establish “some other substantial reason” as the reason for dismissal the employer needs to demonstrate there was a “sound, good business reason” for implementing the changes and therefore dismissing and re-engaging the employees, but the employer does not need to show that making such changes was essential.

The brigade would also need to establish that it had acted reasonably. This means that the brigade would be expected to have consulted all affected employees before making the decision to dismiss and after considering whether there were any viable alternatives before terminating the old contracts.

In addition, where the brigade was dismissing and re-engaging more than 20



SATOSHI KAMBAYASHI

## Legal Beagle

### Answers to some frequently asked legal questions that members put to the FBU

employees in one establishment within a period of 90 days or less, it would have to consult the trade union representatives of any of the employees who might be affected by the proposed dismissals or might be affected by measures taken in connection with the dismissals. Such consultation must begin in good time and must last for at least 30 days before the first dismissal takes effect. Where 100 or more redundancies are proposed at one establishment within a 90-day period, the consultation must last at least 90 days before the first of the dismissals takes effect. This duty to consult arises under section 188 of the Trade Union and Labour Relations (Consolidation) Act 1992.

So it is not at all straightforward for employers to embark on such an extreme course of action. In practice, though, the most effective defence against proposed contractual changes will always be lawful industrial

action rather than reliance upon legal proceedings.

### Sickness and leave

**Q** I have been off sick from work for three months during which I should have been on leave. I have now returned but my employer is saying I am not entitled to my leave back. Are they correct?

**A** There are two issues to consider when answering this question.

The first is that the brigade is obliged to meet the statutory requirements of the working time regulations when allowing you to take annual leave. Under normal circumstances the Grey Book provisions do meet the statutory requirements.

But in cases of sickness absence and annual leave at the same time, if the employers try to operate the Grey Book

provisions so that the annual leave entitlement allowed would fall below the statutory requirement it would be in breach of the working time regulations. You could then bring a claim for this under these regulations but would need to put in a request to take the leave at a particular time. If this was refused you would then need to lodge a grievance within three months less one day of the first day the leave you requested was due to begin and an ET1 claim form within six months less one day of this date. It can only be done for annual leave within the present annual leave year. Therefore if your three-month sickness absence went beyond the current leave year you would not have a claim under the working time regulations.

The second issue is to look at your annual leave entitlement under your contract of employment. Paragraph 24 of section 5 of the Grey Book provides: “An employee who falls sick whilst on annual leave or who is absent on account of sickness when his or her annual leave falls due shall be regarded as being on sick leave provided such absence is covered by a doctor’s statement. In this event the employee may be permitted to take all or part of the outstanding leave at a later date, normally before the end of the current leave year or, in exceptional circumstances, not later than 31 March of the following year at the discretion of the fire and rescue authority”.

So it is wrong for your employer to say simply that you are not entitled to your leave back unless in doing so they have properly considered your request and have acted consistently with the established policy and practice on this issue and have ensured compliance with the working time regulations.

→ The advice published here is not intended as legal advice on individual cases. Write in with your legal problem to [legalbeagle@fbu.org.uk](mailto:legalbeagle@fbu.org.uk) and those of widest relevance to FBU members in the workplace will be selected and answered in future editions. With thanks to Thompsons solicitors.

# 'I'll be travelling round the country filming and documenting members' campaigns and issues'

Alan Miles could soon be visiting a fire station near you as he sets about turning FBUTUBE, already an award-winner, into an even better campaigning tool



Firefighters have stressful jobs, so it's no surprise that once in a while we should think about taking

a step back. For me the decision to ask for a sabbatical was made easier because of my hobby – making films.

My first job was as a runner for a film company in Soho. I used to race through the streets with a trolley-full of film cans, carrying audio reels to editors from sound production studios.

I went to live in France for five years and when I came back, I trained as a firefighter, serving in Chelsea, West Hampstead and then Soho. I've always maintained my interest in film and I studied for a degree in film and television production some seven-odd years ago.

I was taking my camera to demonstrations and working with London FBU. We started sending out short videos to branches to counteract the attacks we were getting in

the media. I was then asked to document the 48-hour strike in 2002 and I followed the national leadership to picket lines in Glasgow, Belfast, Bristol and London. It was at this time I filmed what turned out to be Joe Strummer's last ever gig – an FBU benefit at Acton Town Hall, London.

I turned the subsequent footage into a film *The Night London Burned* and a new 'career' beckoned. I've since made the anti-racist film *Who Shot The Sheriff?* and I'm currently working with Billy Bragg on a film of his *Jail Guitar Doors* project which aims to rehabilitate prisoners through music.

The process of securing the sabbatical took three months from start to finish. I filled in a standard form that had to be approved by my line manager. Then I was interviewed by a senior manager who asked me why I wanted a year off and what I was going to do with the time.

Career breaks are generally granted if you use the time either to spend on self-



## ALAN MILES

Alan Miles has served as a firefighter in London for more than 12 years. Now he feels it's time for a break ...

improvement – whether it's going travelling, doing charity work or studying – or for family reasons.

In the end my brigade was happy with my reasons and that I'll come back refreshed after a year. Both parties win, really.

I've set myself two goals during my sabbatical, namely finishing *Jail Guitar Doors* – which I hope will be screened at the Raindance Festival in the autumn – and developing FBUTUBE.

It's an exciting time for FBUTUBE because social networking – MySpace, Facebook, YouTube etcetera – is really taking off and I think it's vital that trade unions are part of this.

Millions of people around the world are communicating through these sites, using them to give themselves a voice, and we should too.

FBUTUBE was commended in last year's



PICTURES: FRASER BAND

Alan Miles – together with Duncan Milligan, FBU Head of Communications, who assists Alan on the road with various aspects of direction and editing – interviews FBU member Lynne Gow





 **FBUTUBE**  
[www.youtube.com/fbutube](http://www.youtube.com/fbutube)

TUC trade union communications awards because of its well-produced videos and its accessibility, both to FBU members and members of the general public.

It's accessible because whereas we used to send a video to branches and ask them to show it at meetings that would necessarily exclude some members, now we can email all our members with a link to the site and they can watch it whenever or wherever they like. So it has a much wider audience.

For example, we put up a film about ill-health pensions that was seen by more than 3,000 people in a weekend.

And in the South West our film about the closure of a fire station was picked up by the local newspaper. They printed a link to FBUTUBE and we got loads of hits as a result. I'm not big-headed enough to think we won the campaign simply because of the film, but it definitely helped because it took our campaign beyond our members and into the community.

Where FBUTUBE also works is that it brings people together. By nature, firefighters get on with other firefighters and now we have the chance to see what other firefighters are doing all round the country.

Potentially, it also gives us an industrial advantage because, say there's a dispute in Belfast over shift patterns, firefighters in Cornwall can keep tabs on it, which will help them if their brigade decides to follow suit and adopt the same tactics.

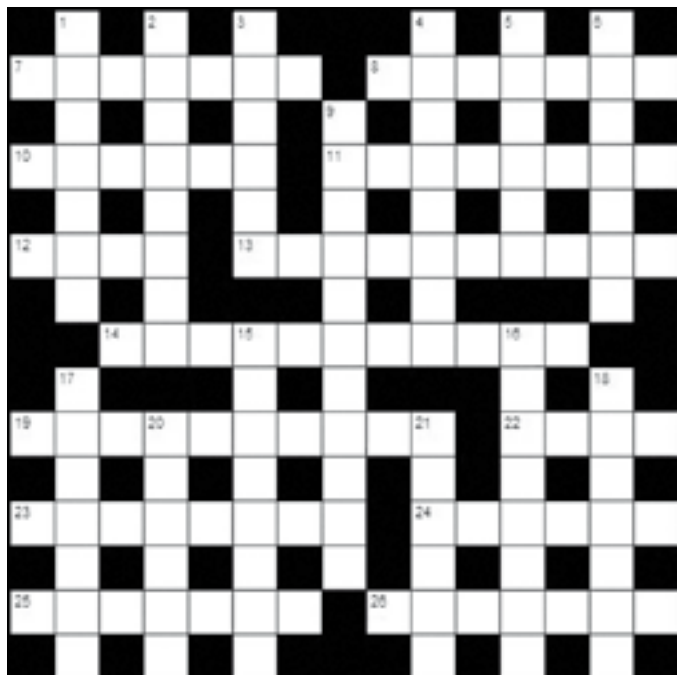
So that's my task for my year off – make FBUTUBE a must-visit website for ordinary firefighters. I want it to become their voice.

That means I'll be spending time travelling round the country speaking to and filming members in the regions, documenting their campaigns and issues and devoting more time to edit the final product so that FBUTUBE is exactly where I, and the FBU, want it.



→ If you have any story ideas or campaigns you think would benefit from exposure contact Duncan Milligan at FBU Head Office.

## Quick Crossword

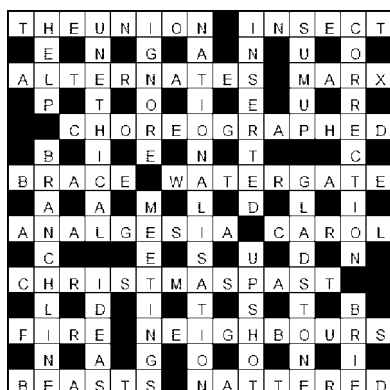


### ACROSS

- 7 Musical set in nazi Germany (7)
- 8 Copy (7)
- 10 Boil gently (6)
- 11 Neither local nor national – but too big for 22, 23 (8)
- 12 Often stranded up trees (4)
- 13 Protect eyes with these (10)
- 14 Not needed (11)
- 19 One who actively champions a cause (10)
- 22, 23 Our emergency centres – Not a good idea to make them 11 (4, 8)
- 24 Major workplace health hazard (6)
- 25 Reduced in rank (7)
- 26 Bring on; make bigger; reveal image (7)

### DOWN

- 1 English title of major work by Marx (7)
- 2 Hard cheese! (8)
- 3 Precious 'stones' from oysters (6)
- 4 Imports illegally (8)
- 5 Inundations – we attend these, too (6)
- 6 Wandered off (7)
- 9 Intoxication – and the behaviour it causes (11)
- 15 Instalments of TV series (8)
- 16 Found on football fields and job applications (8)
- 17 Dagger attached to rifle (7)
- 18 Weathering away (7)
- 20 Not something to pour on flames (6)
- 21 Slice of bacon (6)



Solution to the  
January/February  
puzzle



## Prize Quiz

### Win a pair of Eurostar tickets

1 What European city is also known as the 'eternal city'?



2 In what European city would you most likely eat chips with mayonnaise?

3 In what Catalan city would you find the

architecturally unusual buildings of Gaudi?

4 Name the westernmost capital city of mainland Europe?

5 What UK city was European capital of culture in 2008?

6 What European city is split into two parts by the Danube river?



### Answers to Jan/Feb quiz

1. Jelly fish
2. Bradford & Bingley
3. Barack Obama
4. George Osborne
5. Jonathan Ross and Russell Brand
6. Martina Navratilova

**Winner** of the Christmas Hamper November/December 2008 quiz was Bryan Palmer of Pembrokeshire

**Winners** of the Philosophy Football t-shirts were:  
Ron Watson of Northern Ireland  
K Steele of West Yorkshire

David Allan of Blairgowrie  
D Fereday of West Midlands  
Andy Carr of Birmingham  
Mark Faulkner of Pontefract  
Daniel O'Dowdall of London  
Garry Sawdy of Cheshire  
Kevin Fentiman of Kent

### HOW TO ENTER

To win a pair of Eurostar tickets to Paris or Brussels please send your answers to the Prize Quiz by 31 March 2009 on a postcard to: Prize Competition (March 2009) FBU Head Office, Bradley House, 68 Coombe Road, Kingston upon Thames, Surrey KT2 7AE. Include your name, address and membership number. The winner will be selected at random from all correct entries.





# StationCat

... brings you the news they don't want you to hear

## Trivial pursuits?



You'd almost think it was a plot. Just a week before the Audit Commission was due to suggest that we could save money by getting rid of frontline firefighters and making the remaining ones use cheaper equipment, the Conservative chair of the London Fire Authority, one Brian Coleman, attacked Liberal Democrat MP Lynne Featherstone for calling out the fire service, saying that people used it for trivial purposes.

Yet Ms Featherstone's boiler was banging alarmingly and she had good reason to suspect an explosion was imminent.

"She did absolutely the right thing to call out the fire service," says one of the firefighters who attended, Ben Sprung, who is the FBU Camden borough representative.

If firefighters were routinely dealing with trivial incidents, as Coleman seems to be saying, there would be a case for cutting the service.

**Suspicious folk might think Coleman was trying to sabotage the service he chairs**, but he couldn't possibly be doing that. Could he?

## London clown



Actually, Station Cat was one of the few in the land who was unsurprised by the tone of Mr Coleman's extended sneer in the Daily Mail.

The Cat once sat beside him at a lunch in County Hall, which he spent sneering at the female Labour candidate seated beside him, who he apparently assumed was a feminist, and therefore worthy of derision.

He went on to confide in the Cat that a Conservative woman councillor in his own borough of Barnet had accused her male colleagues of sexism, which he thought uproariously funny.

So Cat was unsurprised that his method of attack was to tell Daily Mail readers that Ms Featherstone was a "dizzy airhead" – or that he later asked: **"Would a man have called the fire brigade? I don't know."**

The Cat wonders whether Londoners can feel safe in their beds at night while this clown chairs their fire service.

## Waste strategies



The call, according to Mr Coleman, wasted £250 of public money. Mr Coleman's Conservative colleagues in his own back yard in Barnet have done much better: they have just wasted £27.4 million. They did it by the simple stratagem of taking financial advice from a company called Butlers, run by the Conservative Party treasurer Michael Spencer.

Butlers told them to put their ratepayers' shirts into Icelandic banks, and they did. Pouf! They've gone.

## Strange coincidences



Big as Barnet's losses are, there are bigger ones. The biggest investor in Icelandic banks, also advised by Butlers, was Conservative-controlled Kent, whose council tax payers have had to say a fond goodbye to £50.3 million. Kent, perhaps coincidentally, is planning further cuts in its fire and rescue service, on top of the 50 jobs it cut two years ago.

In fact, it's surprising how many councils lost money because they took bad advice from Butlers to invest in Icelandic banks.

Of the 116 local authorities who lost money, 51 received advice from Butlers. Their losses came to £470m, more than half the total amount of council funds frozen in the banks.

Several councils claim they were not warned early enough about the vulnerability of the banks, despite Butlers being contracted to evaluate and monitor their creditworthiness.

**And it's equally surprising how many of the losers are also planning cuts in the fire and rescue service.** Are their residents paying in safety for the financial incompetence of Mr Spencer's company?

In the fifth biggest loser, Dorset, £28.1 million down, the chief fire officer has just convinced councillors to move 16 firefighter posts from the frontline in Weymouth, to remove primary crewing from the aerial appliance and to reduce the number of fire appliances from three to two.

The sixth biggest loser, Hertfordshire, £28m the poorer after following Butlers into an Icelandic adventure, wants to save about

£1m a year on the FRS budget.

At number 10 comes Surrey, yet again a Butlers client, but with losses of a mere £20 million. Surrey does not seem to have learned its lesson about financiers: it wants to build its eleven new fire stations using private finance initiative money.

These 11 stations are expected to replace the existing 20, and enable Surrey to cut frontline firefighters too. With an election coming up, they won't put a figure on it, but their "vision" (yes, Surrey is hooked on management jargon as well as bad financial advice) makes it clear that they want to have fewer firefighters.

## Dire straits



If no one else understands just how much of a mess the banks have got themselves into, there are signs that at least the banks themselves are perceiving it, however dimly. The Cat had occasion to ring the Royal Bank of Scotland recently. That's the one where the shares collapsed and whose estimated bad debts and write-downs on the value of past acquisitions could leave it as much as £28 billion in the red for 2008. They put him on hold and played some music. It was Sultans of Swing. By Dire Straits (*below*).



✂ if you have any snippets you think Station Cat should get his sharp claws into email: [stationcat@fbu.org.uk](mailto:stationcat@fbu.org.uk)

# 25-year badges



**Clive Waugh (r)** Christchurch Fire Station receives his 25-year badge from branch secretary Martyn Rudd



**Dafydd Llewelyn (l)** receives his 25-year badge from North Wales members secretary Arwel Roberts



**David Rowcroft (r)** Bishop Auckland, White Watch, Durham, receives his 25-year badge from branch secretary Andy Mitchell



**Andy Gunningham (front, centre)** Kingswood, Avon, receives his 25-year badge from brigade secretary Chris Jackson with regional official Kevin Herniman. Back row: Green Watch



**Gwyn Tegfan Jones (l)** Green Watch, Rhyl, North Wales receives his 25-year badge from Mike Edwards branch secretary, Rhyl



**Jane Cotter (l)** West Midlands Fire Control receives her 25-year badge from Rose Jones, West Midlands brigade secretary



**Jeff Sharp (centre left)** Peckham branch white watch, receives his 25-year badge from Peckham branch rep Jim Badger



**Ken Bennet (l)**, watch manager arson investigation team based at Weston Super Mare, receives his 25-year badge from branch secretary Adam Course



**Mick Shaw (r)** FBU President, receives his 25-year badge from National Treasurer Warren Gee



**Gary Williamson (centre right)**, Northwich, receives his 25-year badge from Dave Williams, brigade secretary. (l to r) Steve Burrage, Steve Tucker and Ronnie Moore, Northwich crew

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## Change of address or next of kin

Advise your Brigade Membership Secretary of any change of address and Head Office of changes to next of kin or nominations for benefits.

## FBU FREEPHONE LEGAL ADVICE LINE

**0808 100 6061**

The line provides advice for **personal injury, family law, wills, conveyancing, personal finance and consumer issues.**

For disciplinary and employment-related queries contact your local FBU representative.

**T THOMPSONS SOLICITORS**

Please send photographic prints or digital picture files to: Firefighter, FBU, 68 Coombe Road, Kingston upon Thames, KT2 7AE or firefighter@fbu.org.uk  
Please include FULL DETAILS for every picture – full names of everyone who is in it; their station/brigade/watch etc; where they are in the picture (eg: left to right); their union posts/branch if relevant; and where and when it was taken.